



News Release

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Oral health challenges in Washington to be tackled by health partners

OLYMPIA — Washington’s reputation as a pioneer in solutions for health care issues has helped set the stage for work to address oral health challenges in the state. Private and public health partners have mapped-out strategies to improve the oral health of all state residents, especially those in greatest need and at greatest risk.

Using the collective input and knowledge of many partners, the State Oral Health Coalition developed Washington’s first [Oral Health Improvement Plan](http://www.ws-ohc.org/plan.htm) (www.ws-ohc.org/plan.htm). Input was collected from community groups, the public, health professionals, educational institutions, businesses, and government agencies. The plan provides strategic guidance to the private and public sectors on areas that need urgent attention — oral disease prevention, oral health promotion, access to care, oral health data, and system improvements.

“Oral health is a crucial factor in our overall health, so it’s vital that we work toward assuring all state residents have access to needed care,” said State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes.

“Prevention is essential to the good oral health important to all of us, everyday. It takes a strong, coordinated effort by the private and public health sectors to make that happen.”

The Oral Health Improvement Plan is a response to the state’s first [oral health needs report released in 2007](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/oral_health/burden.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/oral_health/burden.htm). This report showed that Washington rated low in terms of several cost-effective prevention measures for tooth decay, such as fluoridated water and school dental-sealant programs. The 2007 document raised awareness about the state’s oral health challenges and, as a result, motivated many community groups and organizations at the state and local levels, private and public sectors, to brainstorm the best ways to address these challenges.

“Oral diseases are important public health issues because they negatively affect many children and adults at school and at work,” said Dr. Joseli Alves-Dunkerson, manager of the Department of Health’s Oral Health Program. “Fortunately most oral diseases can be prevented with simple and effective measures.”

Another important document released in 2009 is the state’s first [Oral Health Workforce Report](http://depts.washington.edu/uwrhrc/uploads/CHWS_FR130_Skillman.pdf) (http://depts.washington.edu/uwrhrc/uploads/CHWS_FR130_Skillman.pdf). It provides data on our oral health workforce’s characteristics, major factors affecting the future workforce supply in urban and rural areas, and oral health services for underserved populations. This information may help policymakers find solutions to oral health workforce issues.

Work continues to carry out the strategies suggested in the Oral Health Improvement Plan. The state Department of Health invites oral health professionals and organizations to take part in this effort. Contact [Dr. Joseli Alves-Dunkerson](#) at 360-236-3524 to learn how to get involved.

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